

Jonas's joke, Roy's fembot

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 22 Oct 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3503>

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 22 Oct 2002, 16:25

Roy quoted me and wrote:

In the joke that Jonas tells, a woman interviews three sailors to find out what each one wants the most. The first says power, the second says (social) polish, and the third says love.

The woman laughs and says that they are all robots. The first sailor says that is true, and he can see how she figured it out from the first two answers, since power and polish are things all robots look for, but he couldn't figure out how she detected a robot in the third answer.

She says it is because she began life by looking for power and polish and wound up just like the third sailor. Then the woman and the third sailor go off for a drink and neither of them ever came back to the ship.

So what is the joke? We know that Wolfe has a warped sense of humor, and that Jonas is telling the joke. It only dawned on me today that the woman's last line is also the punch line. We've heard this joke before, in PEACE. The one Weer told Lois: "I knew we were mechanical engineers, but I didn't think we'd wind up like this."

She's a robot, too.

Well, yes, that is a possible funny answer to it . . . and it does put an extra twist . . . and it is a nice tie to the joke in PEACE . . .

But hang on a second! The context of the joke must be expanded a bit: in TBOTNS, Severian the backwater bumpkin knew Jonas was a sailor, but what he did not know was that (star) sailor = robot (more often than not), which is why he was surprised to finally learn that the prosthetics were the bio-bits rather than the metal parts.

Readers of "These Are The Jokes" are assumed to have already read TBOTNS, and thus are expected, I assume, to be on equal footing with the woman conducting the poll (i.e., she knows and we know that sailors = robots). For example the robotic sailors in URTH look as much like a bio as a full suit of plate armor -- there is no mistaking them!

When she laughs and says they are all robots, it can be taken as meaning not "I have deduced from your responses that you are all chems" (which is how the first sailor says he takes it, slyly or not), but rather the Roy C. Lackey <tm> attitude of "How can a bunch of chems like yourselves have such lofty, bio-seeming goals?"

I think the joke plays on the ambiguities of "power" and "polish" when applied to bios and non-clever tools like chainsaws and toasters. And the first sailor is slyly trying to trick the woman into making bio-centric statements, i.e., anti-robot prejudices, but we are told she is a quick thinker and she slips through the trap by claiming their desires as her own, and thus the equality of chem and bio desires.

=mantis=

Roy C. Lackey — 24 Oct 2002, 05:41 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

mantis quoted me and wrote:

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Granted. But if she had been looking at three sailors who were obviously robots (whether the slender type in URTH or those that looked like Sidero), then her statement that they are all robots would be of the water-is-wet variety. The sailors have to look like bios, and they do. The first sailor has a "red beard". The third looked "young". The first sailor also uses a Jonas-like expression referring to a bio-specific function meaningless to a robot; specifically, the sexual innuendo involving the skipper and the strumpet.

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The first line of the joke has three "sailors" on "shore leave". Now what images come to mind of sailors on shore leave? From movies, books, and tv it is all the same: men, temporarily freed from the strictures of shipboard life, engaged in fervid pursuit of the pleasures of the flesh. What is a robot sailor on shore leave going to do for kicks? Go drinking and whoring? Impossible. What is he going to spend his pay on--spare parts? Worthy charities such as a home for retired sewing machines and scholarships for aspiring pocket calculators?

Altruistic love, platonic love may be possible for a robot or chem--such as Marble's for Teasel, at

least in the Lupiverse. But that's not the kind of love Jonas was looking for with Jolenta, nor is it the kind that the third sailor went AWOL for in the joke. Power and polish may be obtainable for a robot, but the love the third sailor desired isn't. Note that the word "desire" is used only by the third sailor in connection with expressing what each wanted.

When the Little Tin Soldier in the folk song jumped into the Fire of Love, all that was left was a puddle of molten metal; or, as Mick Jagger put it, "You can't always get what you want."

-Roy